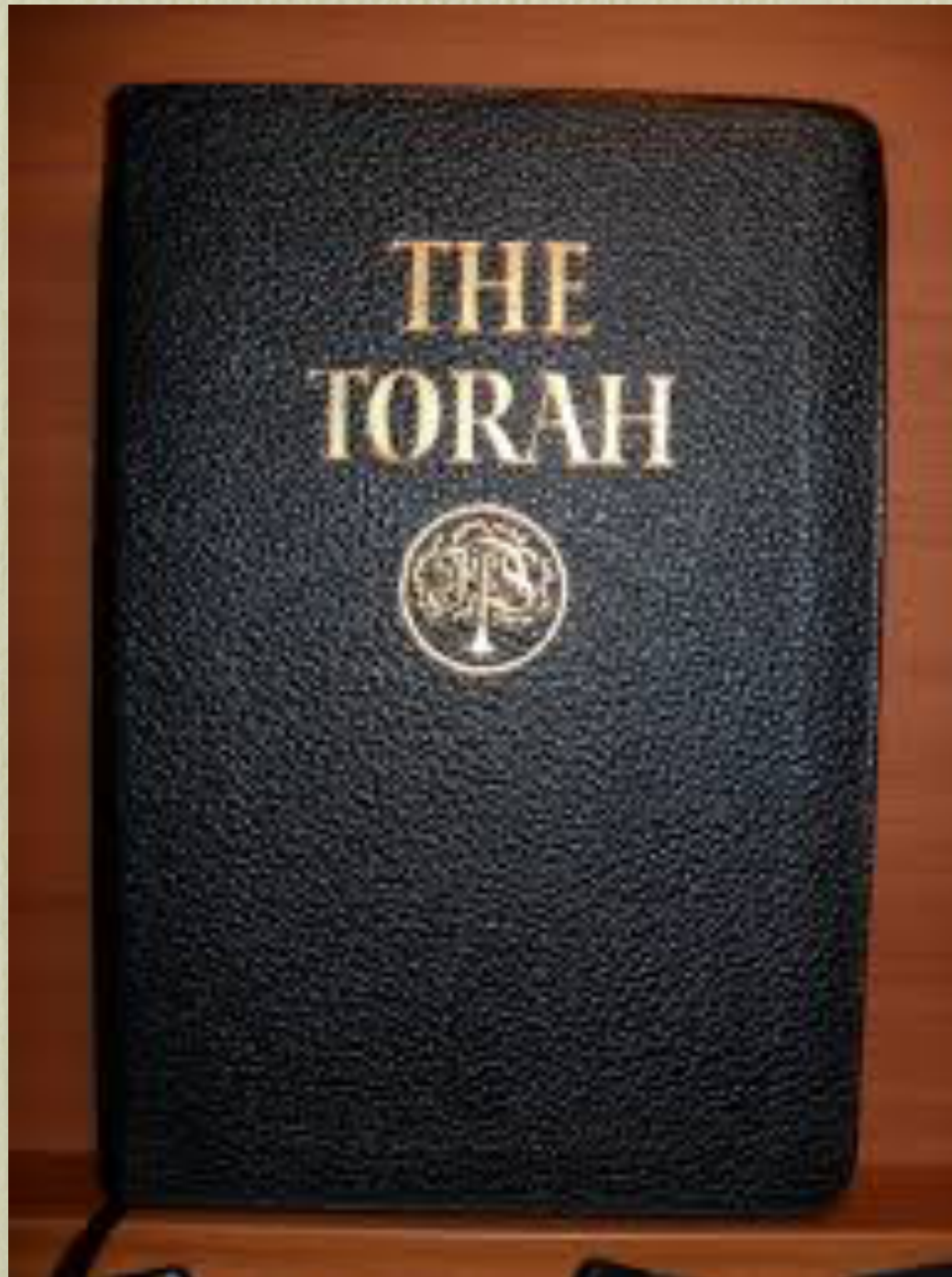


40. Psalm 119

Praying Psalm 119 with Jesus



Stanza One (Presentation 39)

¹Blessed and happy are those
whose lives are blameless,
who follow GOD's law.

²Blessed and happy are those
who keep GOD's decrees
seeking God with all their heart,
³who do no wrong, but follow GOD's way.

⁴You have laid down your precepts to be observed with care.

⁵O that I was steadfast in keeping your statutes!

⁶I would be without shame,
if only my eyes were fixed on your commandments.

⁷I praise you with an upright heart,
as I learn your righteous judgments.

⁸Hold me close to you, and I will observe your statutes.

Stanza Two

⁹How can young people keep themselves pure?

By paying attention to your word.

¹⁰With all my heart I seek you; do not let me stray.

¹¹I treasure your word in my heart, to avoid offending you.

¹²Blessed are you, O GOD; teach me your statutes.

¹³With my lips I recite the judgments you have uttered.

¹⁴I delight in your ways, more than in great riches.

¹⁵I meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your way.

¹⁶I delight in your statutes. I remember your word.

It is because we are ‘seeking God with all our heart’ that we ‘treasure God’s word in our heart’, that we ‘delight in following the way’ God reveals to us, that we ‘pay attention to God’s word.’ We do not want to ‘offend God’, or ‘stray’ from God’s way.

Stanza Three

- ¹⁷Deal bountifully with your servant,
so that I may live and observe your word.
- ¹⁸Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things in your law.
- ¹⁹I am a pilgrim on the earth;
do not hide your commandments from me.
- ²⁰My soul is constantly consumed
with longing for your judgments.
- ²¹You rebuke the insolent,
who wander from your commandments.
- ²²Save me from their scorn and contempt,
for I keep your decrees.
- ²³Even though princes sit plotting against me,
I, your servant, meditate on your statutes.
- ²⁴Your decrees are my delight; they are my counsellors.

¹⁸Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things in your law.

Praying this with Jesus we recall Jesus' ministry of healing the 'blind'. Jesus wants us to see: 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not in the lamp-stand?' (Mark 4:21). Jesus wanted to enlighten (John 9:5). We recall Paul's enlightenment on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9). He calls us to be 'a light to the world' (Matthew 5:14).

In his letter to the Gentile churches Paul prays: 'I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you' (Ephesians 1:15-19).

²³I, your servant, meditate on your statutes.

Stanza Four

²⁵I lie in the dust; revive me by your word.

²⁶I tell you of my straying
and you answer by teaching me your statutes.

²⁷When you make me understand your precepts,
I recognise your wondrous works.

²⁸When I am numb with grief, revive me with your word.

²⁹Turn me away from false paths, graciously teach me your law.

³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness, cherishing your judgments.

³¹O GOD, I cling to your decrees. Do not disappoint me.

³²I hasten along the way of your commandments,
for you set free my heart.

³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness

³²I hasten along the way of your commandments,
for you set free my heart.

We recall Jesus' words: 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free' (John 8:31-32). Jesus continues: 'If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36).

God's commandments do not restrict our lives. On the contrary, they reveal how we are to live so as to be open to welcome God's offer of God's Self, God's offer of love. When we '**stray**' (verse 26), we are '**numb with grief**' (verse 28). God's response is to reveal the way we should walk. Praying this with Jesus we thank God that Jesus is 'the way' (John 14:6). Walking this way we are never alone, for Jesus is walking with us.

Stanza Five

³³Teach me, O GOD, the way of your statutes,
and I will observe them closely.

³⁴Help me understand your will,
that I may keep your law with all my heart.

³⁵Guide me along your path, for in it I delight.

³⁶Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.

³⁷Keep my eyes from looking at vanities;
give me life in your way.

³⁸Confirm to your servant your promise,
which is for those who revere ['fear'] you.

³⁹Keep me from the disgrace that I dread.
How good are your judgments.

⁴⁰See, I long for your precepts;
in your righteousness, give me life.

³⁴Help me understand your will,
that I may keep your law with all my heart.

The history of Ancient Israel is a history of failure to ‘**keep God’s law**.’ Hence the promise of Jeremiah: ‘The days are surely coming, says GOD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says GOD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be my people’ (Jeremiah 31:31-33; quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews 8:8-12).

This is reinforced by the prophet Ezekiel: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances' (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his gift of himself at the Last Supper, a gift which he saw as a fulfilment of the promises given by God through Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jesus called it 'a new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20; see 1 Corinthians 11:25). Jesus is 'the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance' (Hebrews 9:15). Jesus asked his disciples to do what he is doing: to give our lives in love for each other, indeed for the world. Paul saw himself as graced to be 'a minister of the new covenant' (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Stanza Six

⁴¹Touch me, O GOD, with your covenant love.

Save me as you promised.

⁴²Then I will have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in your word.

⁴³Let me speak the whole truth, for my hope is in your judgments.

⁴⁴I keep your law, now and always will.

⁴⁵I walk freely, following your precepts.

⁴⁶I will speak of your decrees before kings, and not be ashamed.

⁴⁷I find my delight in your commandments, because I love them.

⁴⁸I revere your commandments, which I love,
and I meditate on your statutes.

⁴¹Touch me, O GOD, with your covenant love.

Jesus offers more than a ‘**touch**’. He promises to live in our hearts, along with the Father and the Spirit: the communion in love which he shares with the Father (John 14:15-23; see John 17:26).

In verse 47-48 the psalmist speaks of his ‘**delight in God’s commandments**’ and of ‘**loving**’ them and ‘**meditating**’ on them. We hear Jesus saying: ‘I do nothing on my own. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him’ (John 8:28-29). At his baptism Jesus was overwhelmed by an experience of God’s delighting in him (Mark 1:9-11). Jesus knew that God wants everyone ‘to live, and to live to the full’ (John 10:10). God reveals how we are to live so as to welcome the love that God is constantly pouring over us. Jesus knew this. Hence his commitment to respond to God’s will with all his mind and soul and heart and will. He wants us to do the same, for this is the way to the life and happiness for which we are created.

Stanza Seven

⁴⁹Remember your word to your servant. It has given me grounds for hope.

⁵⁰This is my comfort in distress, that your promise gives me life.

⁵¹The arrogant utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.

⁵²When I think of your judgments from of old, I take comfort, O GOD.

⁵³Indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake your law.

⁵⁴Your statutes have been the subject of my songs in the land of exile.

⁵⁵I remember you in the night, O GOD, and cherish your law.

⁵⁶This is what counts for me: to obey your precepts.

Exiled from his home, the psalmist rejoices that he finds his 'home' in knowing and obeying God's will. No one can take this from him. It gives him 'life' and 'grounds for hope'.

⁵⁶This is what counts for me: to obey your precepts.

Praying this with Jesus we recall his words: 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother' (Mark 3:35). Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy: 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Deuteronomy 8:3; see Matthew 4:4). And Paul writes: 'In Christ Jesus ... the only thing that counts is faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6). Paul speaks of 'the obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5).

Stanza Eight

⁵⁷YOU, O GOD, are my portion. I promise to keep your word.

⁵⁸I implore your favour with all my heart.

Be gracious to me according to your promise.

⁵⁹When I think of your ways, I turn my steps to your decrees.

⁶⁰I hasten, and do not delay to keep your commandments.

⁶¹Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me, I do not forget your law.

⁶²At midnight I rise to praise you for your righteous judgments.

⁶³I am a companion of all who revere ['fear'] you,
who keep your precepts.

⁶⁴The earth, O GOD, is full of your love; teach me your statutes.

⁵⁷YOU, O GOD, are my portion.

In Psalm 16 the psalmist says to GOD: ‘I have no good apart from you’ (Psalm 16:2). Others choose other gods, but ‘GOD is my chosen portion and my cup’ (Psalm 16:5).

In Psalm 73 we read: ‘My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever’ (Psalm 73:26).

God has chosen us as his heritage: ‘Blessed and happy is the nation whose God is GOD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage’ (Psalm 33:12). And in turn God gives God’s Self to us as ours.

⁶⁴The earth, O GOD, is full of your love

Jesus revealed that it is this love that God wants to give everyone, without exception.

Stanza Nine

⁶⁵You have dealt well with your servant, just as you promised.

⁶⁶Teach me right discernment and knowledge,
to put faith in your commandments.

⁶⁷Before I was humbled I went astray, but now I obey your word.

⁶⁸You are good and your deeds are good; teach me how to obey.

⁶⁹The arrogant smear my name with lies,
but with all my heart I keep your precepts.

⁷⁰Their hearts are cold and closed to good, but I delight in your law.

⁷¹It is good for me that I was humbled,
so that I might learn your statutes.

⁷²Your law is better to me than untold wealth.

The psalmist talks about being ‘**humbled**’ (verses 67 and 71). Praying this psalm with Jesus we hear his invitation: ‘Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ (Matthew 11:28-29).

To be humble is to know that all we are and all we have is gift. It is to know the joy of being dependent, knowing that the One on whom we ultimately depend is God, our Loving Father/Mother. The only hope for the proud is to learn humility (see Matthew 23:12). Paul exhorts us: ‘As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience’ (Colossians 3:12).

⁶⁸teach me how to obey.

Praying this with Jesus, we turn to him and ask him to teach us how to pray. When his disciples asked this of Jesus he replied by telling us to begin, not by looking at ourselves, but by looking towards God, allowing ourselves to be caught up in awe, and wanting the whole world to enjoy God's holiness and to know the joy of doing God's will and so bringing about the reign of God's love (Luke 11:1-2). Only then are we to think of ourselves, trusting our daily needs to God's love, confident in God's forgiveness, and in the knowledge that God will be with us in our trials.

Stanza Ten

⁷³It was your hands that fashioned me.

Give me understanding that I may know your ways
and obey your commandments.

⁷⁴Those who revere you see me and rejoice, because I hope in your word.

⁷⁵How right your judgments, O GOD, how wisely you humble me.

⁷⁶Comfort me with your covenant love, just as you promised.

⁷⁷Let your tender compassion cover me, that I may live,
for your law is my delight.

⁷⁸Let the arrogant be put to shame,
because they undermine me with guile.
As for me, I meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹Let those who revere you turn to me,
so that they may know your decrees.

⁸⁰Keep me true to your statutes, free of all shame.

⁷³It was your hands that fashioned me.

In Psalm 64, the psalmist prays: ‘O GOD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand’ (Psalm 64:8).

The wise teacher writes: ‘Like clay in the hand of the potter, to be moulded as he pleases, so all are in the hand of their Maker, to be given whatever he decides’ (Sirach 33:13).

The psalmist pleads to God to ‘**cover him**’ with God’s tender compassion. We think of the cover of the ark in the inner temple and the plea to be with God there under the protecting wings of the cherubim.

Stanza Eleven

⁸¹I yearn for your salvation; I hope in your word.

⁸²My eyes grow dim from watching for your promise.

I ask, “When will you comfort me?”

⁸³I never forget your statutes. ⁸⁴How many days do I have left?

When will you punish those who persecute me?

⁸⁵The arrogant scheme to trap me; they flout your law.

⁸⁶Your commandments are true. My enemies know only lies.

I am persecuted without cause; be my strength!

⁸⁷They have almost made an end of me;

but I have not forsaken your precepts.

⁸⁸In your covenant love spare my life, so that I may keep your decrees.

The psalmist knows the connection between covenant love and wanting to keep God’s decrees. He knows God. This covenant love is his strength.

Stanza Twelve

⁸⁹You, O GOD, exist for ever; your word is firmly fixed in heaven.

⁹⁰Your faithfulness endures to all generations.

You have established the earth, and it stands firm.

⁹¹According to your decree all exist to serve you.

⁹²If your law had not been my delight,

I would have perished in my misery.

⁹³I never forget your precepts, for by them you give me life.

⁹⁴Save me, for I am yours. I seek your precepts.

⁹⁵The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I observe your decrees.

⁹⁶I have seen a limit to all perfection,

but your commandment is boundless.

⁹⁶I have seen a limit to all perfection

Jesus invites us to 'be perfect as your Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). The kind of perfection to which we aspire is the kind of perfection we see in God as revealed by Jesus: perfection in the gift of self, perfection in love. We are limited in our capacity to love, until we can say with Paul: 'It is no longer I who live. It is the Messiah who lives in me' (Galatians 2:21).

Stanza Thirteen

⁹⁷How I love your law! It is my meditation all day long.

⁹⁸Your commandment makes me wiser than my foes,
for it is always with me.

⁹⁹I have more understanding than my teachers, for I ponder your decrees.

¹⁰⁰I understand more than the aged, because I keep your precepts.

¹⁰¹I keep my steps from every false way, in order to follow your word.

¹⁰²I do not turn away from your judgments, for you are my teacher.

¹⁰³How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey.

¹⁰⁴Through your precepts I get understanding;
and so I hate every false way.

They wanted to remind themselves to keep God's law before their eyes and to carry out the law in their actions. Here the psalmist wants to keep the law 'always with me' (verse 98). He 'loves God's law' (verse 97) because it gives meaning to his life and keeps him grounded in God's love. 'How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey' (verse 103).

The Pharisees in Jesus' time wore, strapped to their foreheads and to their arms, containers holding key texts from their sacred writings (Matthew 23:5). In the Book of Exodus the people are instructed to remember God's freeing them from slavery in Egypt: 'It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of GOD may be on your lips; for with a strong hand GOD brought you out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:9).

Likewise Deuteronomy: 'Hear, O Israel: GOD is our God, GOD alone. You shall love your GOD with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates' (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; see 11:18).

Stanza Fourteen

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp for my feet a light for my path.

¹⁰⁶I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to observe your righteous judgments.

¹⁰⁷I am severely afflicted. Give me, O GOD, the life you promise.

¹⁰⁸Accept, O GOD, my offerings of praise, and teach me your judgments.

¹⁰⁹My life is continually at risk, but I do not forget your law.

¹¹⁰For me the wicked lay snares, but I do not stray from your precepts.

¹¹¹Your decrees are my heritage for ever; they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹²I incline my heart to perform your statutes for ever, to the end.

The psalmist knows that to receive ‘**the life promised by God**’ (verse 107), he must follow the path laid out for him by God, and revealed in the law. This is not because God’s offer of love is conditional, but because this is the only way we can open ourselves to receive the unconditional offer.

Stanza Fifteen

¹¹³I have no love for the deceitful:

my love is for your law.

¹¹⁴You are my hiding place, my shield; I hope in your word.

¹¹⁵Go away from me, you who do evil,

that I may keep the commandments of my God.

¹¹⁶Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live.

Let me not fail to attain that for which I wait.

¹¹⁷Hold me up, that I may be safe

and have regard always for your statutes.

¹¹⁸You spurn all who swerve away from your statutes;

their cunning is in vain.

¹¹⁹All the wicked of the earth you count as dross;

therefore I cling to your decrees.

¹²⁰In awe [**‘fear’**] of you I tremble, and I revere your judgments.

¹¹⁴You are my hiding place

This is the place Jesus told us to go to when we want to pray (Matthew 6:6). He promised that he would be there along with his Father and the Spirit of love that is their communion (John 14:16-23).

Stanza Sixteen

¹²¹I live by justice and right; do not abandon me to my oppressors.

¹²²Stand up for your servant's welfare; do not let the godless oppress me.

¹²³My eyes tire from watching for your salvation,
and for the fulfilment of your promise.

¹²⁴Deal with your servant according to your covenant love,
and teach me your statutes.

¹²⁵I am your servant; give me understanding,
so that I may know your decrees.

¹²⁶It is time for GOD to act, for they are breaking your law.

¹²⁷Truly I love your commandments more than the finest gold.

¹²⁸I direct my steps by all your precepts; I hate ways that are false.

The psalmist calls himself God's '**servant**' (verses 122, 124 and 125). Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall his gesture of washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper – the action of a servant. He asked us to follow his example: to serve each other. However, he went on to say: 'I am not now calling you servants. I am calling you friends, because I have revealed to you everything that I have heard from my Father' (John 15:15).

In its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the Second Vatican Council wrote: 'From the fulness of his love, God addresses us as his friends, and moves among us in order to invite and receive us into his own company' (Dei Verbum n.2).

It is in our coming to know Jesus more intimately that we will come to know all he heard from the Father, having understanding to know God's decrees.

Stanza Seventeen

¹²⁹Your decrees are wonderful; I guard them with my life.

¹³⁰The unfolding of your word gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.

¹³¹Sighing for you, I long for your commandments.

¹³²Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I love to call on you.

¹³³Keep my steps steady according to your word,
never let evil master me.

¹³⁴Redeem me from human oppression,
that I may keep your precepts.

¹³⁵Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶My eyes stream with tears
over those who do not keep your law.

¹³⁰The unfolding of your word gives light;
it imparts understanding to the simple.

Praying this with Jesus we recall how ‘Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will”’ (Luke 10:21).

¹³⁶My eyes stream with tears over those who do not keep your law.

Praying this with Jesus we recall the following scene: ‘As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognise the time of your visitation from God” (Luke 19:41-44).

Stanzas Eighteen to Twenty-one repeat themes already present in earlier stanzas.

Stanza Eighteen

¹³⁷You are righteous, O GOD, and your judgments are right.

¹³⁸You have established your decrees in righteousness and truth.

¹³⁹Zeal consumes me because my foes forget your word.

¹⁴⁰Your promise is well tested, and your servant loves it.

¹⁴¹I am small and despised, yet I do not forget your precepts.

¹⁴²Your righteousness is everlasting, and your law is true.

¹⁴³When trouble and anguish come upon me,
your commandments are my delight.

¹⁴⁴Your decrees are for ever righteous;
give me understanding that I may live.

Stanza Nineteen

¹⁴⁵With all my heart I cry.

Answer me, O GOD. I will keep your statutes.

¹⁴⁶I cry to you; save me, that I may observe your decrees.

¹⁴⁷I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in your word.

¹⁴⁸I am awake through the night,
meditating on your promise.

¹⁴⁹In your covenant love hear my voice, O GOD;
in your justice preserve my life.

¹⁵⁰Those who want to harm me draw near; they are far from your law.

¹⁵¹But you, O GOD, are close, your commandments are true.

¹⁵²Long ago I learned about your decrees that you fixed for all time.

Stanza Twenty

¹⁵³Look on my oppression and rescue me, for I do not forget your law.

¹⁵⁴Plead my cause and redeem me; give me the life you promised.

¹⁵⁵For the wicked salvation is far off,
for they spurn your statutes.

¹⁵⁶Great is your tender compassion, O GOD.
give me life according to your justice.

¹⁵⁷Many are my persecutors and my adversaries,
yet I do not swerve from your decrees.

[¹⁵⁸I look at the faithless with disgust,
because they do not keep your commands.]

¹⁵⁹See how I love your precepts. Let me live in your covenant love.

¹⁶⁰Your word is founded on truth;
your righteous judgments endure for ever.

Stanza Twenty-one

- ¹⁶¹Princes persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your word.
- ¹⁶²I rejoice at your word like one who finds a treasure.
- ¹⁶³I hate and abhor all falsehood, because I love your law.
- ¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise you for your just judgments.
- ¹⁶⁵Great peace they have who love your law;
nothing can make them stumble.
- ¹⁶⁶I hope for your salvation, O GOD,
and I fulfil your commandments.
- ¹⁶⁷I keep your decrees; I love them dearly.
- ¹⁶⁸I keep your precepts and decrees,
for all my ways are before you.

Stanza Twenty-two

¹⁶⁹Let my cry come before you, O GOD;
give me understanding according to your word.

¹⁷⁰Let my supplication come before you;
rescue me according to your promise.

¹⁷¹My lips pour forth praise, because you teach me your statutes.

¹⁷²My tongue sings of your promise,
for all your commandments are just.

¹⁷³Reach out, ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

¹⁷⁴I long for your salvation, O GOD, your law is my delight.

¹⁷⁵Let me live that I may praise you, let your judgments help me.

¹⁷⁶If I go astray like a lost sheep, seek out your servant,
for I never forget your commandments.

¹⁷⁵Let me live that I may praise you

Praying verse 175, we recall Paul's words about setting our hope on Christ so as to live for the praise of God's glory (Ephesians 1:12).

¹⁷⁶If I go astray like a lost sheep, seek out your servant

Praying this with Jesus, we remember how he went out to rescue the 'lost sheep.' We read: 'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36). Jesus speaks of himself as 'the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep' (John 10: 11). We recall Jesus' parable (Luke 15:3-7).

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus 'the great shepherd of the sheep' (Hebrews 13:20). Peter writes: 'You were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls' (1 Peter 2:25).